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ABSTRACT

This paper proposes an andragogical, adult education, or "learner-friendly" model as an appropriate basis for a program of continuing professional education, specifically for school social workers. It discusses the various factors that must be taken into account in the design, construction, and execution of such a program. The following factors that may be useful as screening devices for planning the program are outlined: status of individual learning needs, factors relating to self-directed learning, factors relating to job situation, and factors relating to individual career paths. Other considerations are also addressed, including appropriate content and appropriate learning sources, methods, and formats for a program of continuing professional education for school social workers. Finally, the paper suggests a process involving representatives of the professional association, the employing and regulatory agencies, and university-affiliated educational consultants as a means of leading to the design of a workable program of continuing professional education. A chart lists the tasks to be accomplished by the learners and the roles to be played by participants in the design and implementation of the program (teachers and environment). A short bibliography concludes the report. (YLB)

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Abridged Version *

CONTINUING EDUCATION FOR SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKERS:

A LEARNER-FRIENDLY MODEL

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Abstract

The paper describes the steps of an inquiry by a state-wide association of school social workers into the continuing learning needs of members and considerations for the design of a comprehensive program of continuing professional education. The paper presents an analysis of learning needs as perceived by practitioners of social work in Wisconsin schools in a process involving a 25 per cent sample of the school social worker population. The paper proposes an andragogical, adult education, or "learner-friendly" model as an appropriate basis for a program of continuing professional education, and discusses the various factors that must be taken into account in the design, construction and execution of such a program. Finally, the paper suggests a process involving representatives of the professional association, the employing and regulatory agencies and university-affiliated educational consultants as a means of forwarding the inquiry and leading to the design of a workable program of continuing professional education.

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& Betty Sancier

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

I. Professionalization and Continuing Education

A. A common complaint among school social workers (henceforth SSWs) is that the graduate program in social work did not prepare them adequately for the work they are called upon to perform in the schools.

1. This is undoubtedly true, but SSWs are not unique; probably no profession prepares its students fully for work in the real world.

2. All education prior to entry into practice is properly viewed as pre-service education.

3. All professions recognize continuing education as vital to the continuing professionalization of the occupation itself and of its members.

B. Professional associations bear a primary responsibility for the continuing professionalization of their members.

1. Pre-service education is delegated mainly to the professional schools where most of the teachers are themselves professionals; in social work, the profession has varied input and influence on the curriculum.

2. In the post-academic period, it is the profession that must initiate and foster continuing professionalization of members; continuing education is a major vehicle for continuing professionalization.

II. The Andragogical or "Learner-Friendly" Model

A. Andragogy is the art and science of the education of adults.

1. Education is a process involving the selection of knowledge and its use in a teaching/learning transaction, the knowledge to be applied in a given environment.

2. Three premises may be stated about SSWs as learners and as participants in the education process:

a. They are mature adults, with all such status implies.

b. They are professional persons, with responsibilities for important undertaking to which they devote a considerable part of their lives.

c. They practice their profession in a given setting which has specific demands and which requires specific knowledge.

B. The elements of the educational process--knowledge, the teacher, the learner, and the environment--are given different orders of consideration in the traditional or academic model and in the andragogical model (see Figure 1).

	The Traditional or Academic Model
KNOWLEDGE:	Exists independently of the learner
TEACHER:	Selects and masters knowledge and treats it according to his or her perception of the learner's need (or someone else's).
LEARNER:	Must grasp the knowledge as it is treated by the teacher.
ENVIRONMENT	The learner must apply the knowledge he or she has grasped as best he or she can.
	The Andragogical Model
LEARNER:	Has multiple needs for knowledge.
ENVIRONMENT:	Creates the needs for specific kinds of knowledge.
TEACHER:	Assists the learner in identifying needs for knowledge and treating it.
KNOWLEDGE:	Is selected and treated in keeping with identified learner needs.

Note 1: The order of consideration of education elements changes in the andragogical model.

Note 2: The roles of teacher and learner change; in the andragogical model, the learner becomes a participant and the teacher becomes a facilitator, as well as a learner.

Note 3: Not all teachers slavishly follow the traditional model; many good teachers have adopted models similar to the andragogical model.

Figure 1: Elements of the Educational Process

C. Attributes of a learner-friendly model.

1. In this model, learners not only become active participants in the educational process, but their characteristics as adult learners also shape the process.

   a. A major difference between adult education and other forms is that, for adults, learning is entirely a voluntary process; even where education is mandatory, what is learned is actually selected by adult learners. Teachers may teach until they are blue in the face; only learners learn.

   b. Therefore, a program of continuing professional learning for adults should have a number of attributes which make it learner-friendly, that is, that lead to participation, learning, satisfaction and rewards.

2. The attributes--a learner-friendly model of continuing professional education should be:

   a. Adult-oriented.

   b. Assumption-free, that is, free of the belief that there is any single or best content, method, format, or style of teaching/learning for continuing professional education.

   c. Appropriate to the needs of the practice environment, applicable to that environment, and should advance competence in that environment.

   d. Available and accessible, that is, offered at times and in places convenient to the needs of busy professional people.

   e. Attractive, that is, intelligently promoted, explained and presented, carried out in pleasant and comfortable facilities, and using methods and materials that are keyed to adults.

   f. Providing ample options.

   g. Amenable to accountability.

   h. Acceptable, that is, recognized as valid for rewards such as credentials, increments, career advancement, status, and for forms of recognition such as certificates and diplomas.

   i. Amenable to participation by the learners in planning, and, insofar as possible, in the execution of learning activities.

IV. Design of the Continuing Education Program

B. What factors need to be considered in selecting continuing education activities, in view of the wide variety of such activities existing or potentially available? There are several sets of factors that may be useful as screening devices for planning the program.

1. Status of individual learning needs.

a. In a line of progression common to all professions, individuals find themselves at one time or another located at some point as shown on the schema that follow (see Fig. 2). A comprehensive program needs to make provision for the needs of learners who are at different points on the continuum.

Deficit ----------			Advancement
Refreshment of basic knowledge and skills	Maintenance of core knowledge and skills	Modernization of of knowledge and skills	Acquisition of state-of-the-art knowledge and skills

Figure 2: Status of Individual Learning Needs.

2. Factors relating to self-directed learning.

a. A basic principle of andragogy holds that, despite collective efforts by groups such as professional associations, the individual is ultimately responsible for his or her own continuing learning.

b. A program of continuing education sponsored by a professional association needs to be designed in such a way as to motivate members to think about and make conscious choices with regard to three factors that make up what may be called a "sense of obligation to continue to learn."

--Continuity: learning experiences should not only lead to the accomplishment of an immediate objective, but also to further and continued growth and development.
--Interaction with experience: continuing learning should be guided by the particular demands of the professional's experience in practice and its value tested in the context of subsequent practice.
--Purposeful selection of learning sources: the professional's choices of learning sources should be based on a plan with an end-view in mind--that they should be able to offer meaningful consequences in practice. There is no single source of

professional learning, but multiple sources; some of them will be described below under "learning sources, methods and formats."

3. Factors relating to the job situation.

   a. The following kinds of existing conditions or changes within the school have a bearing upon individual choices for continuing learning:

   --Requirements for credentials, promotion, and salary increments.
   --The nature of individual and school case-loads.
   --Changes in the patterns of delivering services.
   --Need for retraining to qualify for another job within the school organization.
   --Rise in the organizational hierarchy.

4. Factors relating to individual career-paths.

   a. The following kinds of events occurring in the course of a lifelong career also suggest needs for continuing learning:

   --Return to practice after time away.
   --Move from one kind of practice function to another.
   --Successive rises to jobs of a higher level.
   --Change from a generalist role to that of a specialist, and vice versa.
   --Shift to a different practice setting: small to large; rural to urban; elementary to high school level.
   --Entry into private practice or a consultant role.
   --Awareness of individual and personal aspirations, needs and interests.

C. What content or subject-matter is most appropriate for continuing learning by SSWs? Research has indicated that the content of organized professional learning among social workers in general falls into five categories. About two-thirds of learning activities fall in the first two categories.

1. Client problems and client-oriented services, that is, the "social problem areas."

2. Methods, processes and techniques of service to clients.

3. Support of social service programs and institutions.

4. Social service background and supporting disciplines.

5. Personal growth and personal skills.

D. What learning sources, methods and formats are appropriate to a program of continuing professional education for SSWs?

1. The traditional triad of providers--the agencies, the professional schools and universities, and the professional associations--which now account for approximately 95 percent of the learning activities in which all social workers take part--will undoubtedly continue to be the main providers.

   a. There is likely to be an increase in the number and kinds of learning activities sponsored by independent organizations, many of them commercial; while some of their offerings may be quite appropriate and of good quality, some are likely not to be.

   b. The writers hold that it is in the best interest of the profession that the planning and execution of a program of continuing professional education be a cooperative endeavor.

2. Efforts undertaken by individuals towards their own professional development are an extremely important source of continuing professional learning.

   a. The principle of individual responsibility for one's own continuing learning makes it imperative that independent learning be recognized as valid in a program of continuing education sponsored by a professional association.

   b. The professional association needs to examine questions relating to the kind, the quality and the amount of independent learning that may be accepted for recognition, and to develop guidelines for member initiative in understanding such learning.

3. The professional association itself is a primary source of learning and has a crucial role in promoting continuing learning among its members.

   a. As the representative of the body of learners in SSW, the association carries primary responsibility for planning, initiating and implementing a high quality program of continuing professional education.

   b. The association carries responsibility for involving representatives of the other elements of the educational process--the teachers and the representatives of the environment, i.e., school personnel and personnel from the regulatory agencies--in planning and carrying out the program.

   c. The association carries responsibility for motivating and recognizing member participation in continuing learning.

   d. The association carries responsibility for establishing standards and guidelines for member participation in continuing learning.

e. The association carries responsibility for establishing standards and guidelines for providers in order to assure quality and acceptability in offerings made to members.

f. The association carries responsibility for initiating efforts with the universities, the school systems and the regulatory agencies to establish a cooperative and multiple recognition-and-reward system for continuing learning by members.

4. As a provider of continuing professional learning activities, the association has several unique roles to play.

   a. The professional association carries the responsibility to provide continuing learning activities that other providers cannot offer.

   b. Such activities should adhere to the same high standards of educational quality to which other providers are held.

   c. The professional association has a major responsibility for assisting members in the integration of learnings acquired from many sources.

5. Methods and formats.

   a. The research cited points out that social workers in general take part in organized professional learning using a variety of methods and formats: lectures, short courses, workshops, laboratories, demonstrations, and the like, including traditional academic programs and courses where they are appropriate. Social workers also take part in professional activities in which learning occurs, such as conferences, conventions, forums, symposiums, and similar activities.

   b. It seems clear that no single method or format is best for continuing professional learning. The idea that professional standards can be maintained only when learning takes place under formal conditions and with use of traditional academic methods is simply not true. Different people have different styles of learning, subject-matter is amenable to varying forms of treatment, and skills are learned in a host of different ways.

      --The "myth of credit" needs to be understood. Academic credits are useful only when they lead to direct payoffs, such as a degree or fulfillment of a requirement for credentialling. Most professionmal associations and many credentialling bodies today recognize various kinds of learning activities and accept the continuing education unit (CEU) as a valid measure of educational participation.

V. Tasks to be Accomplished

A. The tasks to be accomplished, the steps be taken and the roles to be played by participants in the design and implementation of a comprehensive program of continuing professional education are listed in the chart that follows (see Fig. 3).

THE LEARNERS	THE TEACHERS	THE ENVIRONMENT
Represented by the Wisconsin School Social Workers Association	Represented by educational consultants from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and other providors	Represented by school personnel: teachers/ administrators and by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction
Tasks	**Roles**	**Roles**
1. Initiate a planning process	Consult	Participate
2. Determine the components of a comprehensive program of continuing professional education --Kinds of content --Amounts of participation over a given time period. --Balance among: .Formal learning activities .Professional activities in which learning occurs .Independent learning	Consult re design	Participate
3. Establish a measurement and recordkeeping system to	Provide access to UW and other recordkeeping systems	Provide access to DPI recordkeeping system

The learners: Tasks (cont.)	The Teachers: Roles (cont.)	The Environment: Roles (cont.)
include academic credits, CEUs and measures of independent learning.		
4. Establish a recognition-and-reward system	Provide recognition through certificates	Give recognition in credentialling systems
5. Establish and publish standards and guidelines for member participation, including guidelines for independent learning	Consult re design and content	Consult re DPI and school systems requirements and standards
6. Establish and publish standards and guidelines for providers, including the association itself	Consult re standards of of educational quality	Consult re DPI and school system requirements and standards
7. Implement first-stage pilot programs	Observe and give feedback	Observe and give feedback
8. Approve offerings by outside providers	Agencies and universities provide learning activities	Schools provide in-service and staff development activities
9. Negotiate with some providers for content-specific learning activities	Provide teaching resources for content-specific activities	Schools include social work content in in-service activities
10. Provide learning activities as a sponsor	Consult re design and quality	Representatives participate as resources
GOALS: Knowledge, competence and improved service to children and the school.		

Figure 3: Planning and Implementing the Continuing Professional Education Program: Tasks and Roles

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